



February 26th, 2023

Re: Black and Brown United in Action testimony in support of SB 4

Dear Senator Moore, Senator Lesser, Representative Khan, Representative Luxenberg and members of the Housing Committee:

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization which focuses on immigrant rights, worker's rights, women's rights, and all matters which adversely affect the lives of Black and Brown people in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of SB 4, An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present And Future Housing Needs. We appreciate your raising this important legislation, and look forward to your work to fight poverty. In too many Black and Brown households we are unable to transfer wealth because we have to transfer debt, it is very expensive to be poor in Connecticut. These actions will also save court time, it will also create a more manageable flow of operations and truly build upon diversity, equity and inclusivity as for the first time, renters will actually have rights.

Thank you Representative Luxenberg for recognizing that "the economic devastation that's been caused by the COVID era and the post-COVID economy has hurt those who are most vulnerable in our state". To be homeless means to have nowhere permanent and safe that you are able to call home. According to data retrieved from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Connecticut lacks about 85,400 units of housing that are affordable and available to its lowest-income renters. Additionally, rents and evictions have steadily risen in the state over the past year forcing many Black and Brown people out of neighborhoods. The cost of housing at all levels is pricing out renters and potential owners, increasing housing instability and homelessness in Connecticut.

As noted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, housing insecurity rates are pretty consistent across the United States. For most of the United States, between 10% and 5% of households are housing insecure. HUD defines cost-burdened families as those "who pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing" and "may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care." Severe rent burden is defined as paying more than 50% of one's income on rent. Cost-burdened households have little left over each month to spend on other necessities such as food, clothing, utilities, and health care. Black and Brown households are more likely than White households to be cost burdened.

Due to a limited rental market with few affordable vacancies, people with the lowest incomes (mostly Black and Brown people) are forced to rent substandard housing, and are exposed to health and safety risks, such as vermin, mold, water leaks, and inadequate heating or cooling systems. The term slum landlord dates to 1893, but first appeared in 1953, coined by Newsday Reporter Edward G. Smith. A slumlord is a street term for a landlord, generally an absentee landlord with more than one property, who attempts to maximize profit by minimizing spending on property maintenance, often in deteriorating neighborhoods, often charging lower than market rent to tenants. Severe housing shortages allow slumlords to charge higher rents. As many of these

neighborhoods are often populated by poor Black and Brown people. A "retail slumlord" is one who keeps a shopping mall in a bad shape until the government buys or confiscates it.

Decades of research has shown how social risk factors like housing insecurity, poverty, cultural and language barriers, limited health literacy, and limited access to social benefits and programs can adversely impact a person's health. Current studies have shown that for cancer patients, housing insecurity in particular may make their cancer worse. "Social risks affect how we interact with the health care system and other social systems," (Matthew Banegas, lead author on the study and a researcher at the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research in Portland, Oregon). Insecure living is a health risk. This study builds on other work that has shown the negative effects of housing insecurity, from worsening people's mental health to disrupting treatment for HIV/AIDS.

The study investigated the social risks experienced by more than 1,200 US cancer patients at the time of their diagnosis to see whether being exposed to risk factors specifically housing insecurity, food insecurity, financial hardship, transport difficulties increased their risk of dying from their cancer. The researchers found there was a two-fold greater risk of death for patients experiencing unstable housing - which can refer to a range of housing-related challenges, including homelessness, difficulty paying rent, overcrowding, moving frequently, or spending the majority of income on housing - compared to people who were not. The study didn't assess how insecure housing might influence cancer mortality. What was demonstrated was how the stress of insecure living, for instance, might raise the risk of cancer developing. Or how the disruption caused by housing insecurity might impact a person getting screening, or affect someone's chances of receiving high-quality treatment. Housing acts as a hub for a person to access health care, and so instability can disrupt access to services.

The COVID-19 pandemic should have reminded us all of the importance of physical and mental health, the devastation of loss and the impact of time. With that in mind, we ask you to pass SB 4, An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present And Future Housing Needs and also ask for HB 6666 to be amended so that the revenue from the higher fines is split between the state and the municipality and for the maximum fine for housing code violations to inflation going forward so that its value and impact do not erode over time. Recognizing the lack of affordable housing and increasing housing insecurity in Black and Brown communities, we urge you to pass HB 6588 An Act Concerning Rent Stabilization, HB 6589 An Act Concerning Rent Stabilization In Mobile Manufactured Home Parks, HB 6666 An Act Expanding Renters' Rights, HB 6706 An Act Concerning the Rental Assistance Program as well as to raise and support HB 6109 An Act Concerning Tenant Rights which will empower renters and lessen landlord abuse, allowing people to enjoy the space they work hard to pay for.

In closing, as you listen to the testimonies being shared, we urge you to consider the viability of democracy when someone who does not speak English as a first language or needs communication support services such as sign language is only afforded 3 mins to share their testimony. Kindly acknowledge that access to healthcare includes being able to effectively and efficiently share thought, which will prove difficult if there is a lack of resources and time, both of which can feel like a cage to someone who is only trying to share their story. We appreciate the time, effort and courage which you put into your work to represent us, and are asking for you to consider how improving language and time access will increase our participation and support of your endeavors of improving our communities during the legislative process.

With appreciation,

Black and Brown United in Action